

Through this process, I believe House Members in both parties have paid close attention to the constituents back home. A lot of our constituents in Georgia, for example, are saying you all are not going far enough. You are backing off on your promises. You are not doing what you said you are going to do. Maybe in some areas you have gone too far too fast. But people want us to listen, and they want to be assured that what we are doing is in the interests of what is best for the Republican Party but for the American public.

I believe that that is the case, Mr. Speaker. But I must say I worry about our friends on the other side of the aisle, if they are listening to the degree that they need to be listened to. I would urge the folks back home, because of that, to continue writing Members of the House and the Senate and give opinions on how they feel, because I do not think the message in every case is getting through. As we go into the budget process, right now it is even more important than other times.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from California [Mr. DORNAN], if he would like some time.

Mr. DORNAN. Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to tell the gentleman, I want to associate myself with his remarks. I am going to ask for a 5-minute special order here myself to discuss the infamous O.J. Simpson trial. I wanted to let the Chair know that I was going to ask for that when the gentleman is through. I certainly appreciate the 5-minute special order.

Mr. KINGSTON. Mr. Speaker, the gentleman from California is never without an opinion and never without truth and righteousness. It was refreshing to see the gentleman the other night spouting some of his views.

THE PROBLEM OF MEDICARE FRAUD AND ABUSE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Connecticut [Ms. DELAURO] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. DELAURO. Mr. Speaker, I am proud to kick off a series of 5-minute special orders this evening to address the growing problem of Medicare fraud and abuse. It is shameful that Members of Congress have been virtually denied the opportunity to discuss the leadership's proposal to cut Medicare by \$270 billion, and it is unprecedented its rollback of Medicare fraud law enforcement.

The Republican plan would devastate Medicare to pay for a tax giveaway for the wealthy, but it also misses a golden opportunity to fix a major problem with Medicare. In fact, it actually makes this serious problem worse. The GOP plan actually will make it easier for Medicare cheats to get away with their health care scams. This plan rips off American taxpayers and American seniors.

Many of us are genuinely concerned with strengthening the Medicare system, and we have urged a crackdown on Medicare fraud. I am happy that some of my colleagues have joined with me tonight to talk about this critical issue. I am proud to commend the gentleman from Michigan [Mr. LEVIN] for his commitment to combatting fraud and abuse in Medicare. The gentleman from Michigan plays a key role on the Committee on Ways and Means in the effort to toughen the punishments for fraud and strengthening our enforcement capabilities.

I would like to recognize the gentleman from Illinois [Mr. DURBIN], an original cosponsor of my legislation, the Health Care Prosecution Act, to combat fraud and abuse in our health care system. The gentleman has been a leader in the fight to defeat the GOP's Medicare cuts and to restore integrity to the Medicare program for our elderly.

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I also would like to thank the gentleman from New Jersey, Mr. FRANK PALLONE, and the gentleman from Ohio, Mr. SHERROD BROWN, for joining us tonight. Their work on the Committee on Commerce to remedy fraud and abuse in the Medicare system has been invaluable.

We are here tonight, Mr. Speaker, to let the American people know that the Republican bill does not, let me repeat, it does not toughen enforcement measures. It does not even defend the status quo. Far worse, the Republicans turn back the clock on Medicare fraud enforcement.

Just today, Mr. Speaker, the Inspector General of Health and Human Services and the Justice Department that monitors, the policemen, if you will, the fraud that occurs in the health care system said that the Republican proposal would make it harder for the government to obtain convictions under an anti-kickback statute, and, in fact, would cripple the Justice Department's ability to crack down on health care fraud.

The Congressional Budget Office estimates that stopping the growing problem of fraud could save as much as \$80 billion. And despite this evidence, the GOP plan does nothing to crack down on waste, fraud and abuse. That is because the plan has nothing to do with fixing Medicare, it has everything to do with providing the Republicans' rich political supporters with a fat tax giveaway.

Mr. Speaker, while I am sadly disappointed, I am not surprised, as the Washington Times, not exactly a liberal publication, reported last week Speaker Gingrich dismissed the necessity of cracking down on Medicare cheats by suggesting that we have insufficient jail space to lock up all the crooks in the system. The GOP shows no hesitation to crack down on the elderly, the sick, the disabled, the poor, and the young in their plan. But when

it comes to targeting the real bad guys, the Republicans suddenly express concern about inadequate vacant correctional facility space.

The congressional leadership is not interested in correcting and punishing the criminal elements in the Medicare system. However, I have introduced legislation in this Congress, the Health Care Prosecution Act, to do just that. My bill stops health care cheats in their tracks. It retrieves the financial losses in restitution and fines and it puts the criminals behind bars so that they are unable to pull off more health care scams in the future.

Further, my legislation establishes a temporary health care fraud and abuse commission to study the nature and the extent of fraud in our system. This blue ribbon panel would make recommendations to Congress on innovative approaches to attack fraud.

Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of good ideas out there about how to attack Medicare fraud, waste and abuse. I am sorry that my Republican colleagues have chosen to pursue none of that.

Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to be joined by additional colleagues tonight who will also address this issue of Medicare fraud and abuse and the way that we might address it, and that it is not addressed in the Republican proposal.

REPUBLICANS WEAKEN FRAUD AND ABUSE PROVISIONS IN THEIR BILL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Michigan [Mr. LEVIN] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the gentlewoman from Connecticut [Ms. DELAURO] for talking about this issue, and I would like to say a few words as a Member of the Committee on Ways and Means.

Mr. Speaker, we worked on this issue. I was deeply disappointed with the product that came out of the committee: \$270 billion in Medicare cuts in order to pay for a tax break, mostly for wealthy families, is bad enough, doubling the monthly premium for seniors in part B, the physician and other provider part of Medicare, is bad enough, especially when we take into account, for example, looking at Michigan, that 85 percent of the seniors in Michigan have an income annually of less than \$25,000 and \$15,000 is the annual income of 70 percent of the seniors.

So doubling the premium is bad enough, Mr. Speaker, but the Republicans went further and they weakened the fraud and abuse provisions of Medicare. They weakened them.

Mr. Speaker, I want to refer to a few documents. There are two sets of penalties involved: one is criminal, where there is intentional serious fraudulent action; and the other is monetary civil penalties, where the offense is less serious. Both of them are weakened.

The criminal is weakened by adding a provision requiring that the significant